

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A method of sorting out defect-free workpieces blanked out of a metal sheet, comprising the steps of:

inserting the workpieces into a passage having a predetermined width to sort out those workpieces which have passed through said passage;

analyzing respective images of the workpieces which have passed through said passage to compare the images with a reference workpiece image, reject workpieces which have a portion different from said reference workpiece image, and sort out other workpieces; and

applying a gauge having a shape complementary to a required shape for a functional portion of the workpieces, to the workpieces which have been sorted out, and sorting out those workpieces whose functional portion has a shape complementary to the shape of said gauge, as defect-free workpieces,

wherein said step of applying a gauge, further comprises the step of inserting a pair of gauge portions of said gauge into respective recesses formed in the workpieces, said recesses being formed between a body and a head of the workpieces.

2. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein said step of analyzing respective images of the workpieces inserted into the passage comprises the steps of:

converting the images of the workpieces into respective binary images each having a predetermined number of pixels in a unit area, comparing the binary images with said reference workpiece image, reject workpieces which have a portion different from said reference workpiece image, and sort out other workpieces.

3. (Currently Amended) A method comprising the steps of:

sorting out defect-free elements blanked out of a metal sheet, each having a body and a head joined to the body with a pair of recesses defined therebetween, the elements being stacked in a transverse direction thereof into an annular form and bundled together by an assembly of stacked endless metal rings inserted in said recesses into a belt for use in a continuously variable ~~transmission, said method comprising the steps of:~~ transmission;

inserting the elements into a passage having a predetermined width to sort out and deliver those elements which have passed through said passage to a feed path;

analyzing respective images of the elements which have been delivered to said feed path while in said feed path to compare the images with a reference element image, reject elements which have a portion different from said reference element image, and feed other elements;

stacking and arraying the fed elements in a transverse direction thereof downstream of said feed path; and

passing the arrayed elements through a gauge having a shape complementary to a required shape for the recesses of the elements, and sorting out those elements which have passed through said gauge as defect-free elements.

4. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 3, wherein said step of analyzing respective images of the elements comprises the steps of:

converting the images of the elements into respective binary images each having a predetermined number of pixels in a unit area, comparing the binary images with said reference element image, rejecting workpieces which have a portion different from said reference element image, and feeding other elements.

5. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 3, wherein said portion different from said reference element image is either entrapped foreign matter, an outer profile deformation, or a defect.

6. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 5, wherein said entrapped foreign matter comprises an abrasive particle used to grind an element.

7. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 5, wherein said outer profile deformation comprises a partial broken-off region of an element.

8. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 5, wherein said defect comprises a recess in a surface of an element.

9. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein in said step of inserting, workpieces that are smaller than said predetermined width are passed through said passage to a feed path, and workpieces that are larger than said predetermined width are rejected.

10. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 9, wherein in said step of analyzing, workpieces that have passed through said passage to said feed path are analyzed, and the workpieces that are not rejected are passed through said feed path to said gauge.

Claim 11: (Canceled)

12. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim ~~44~~ 1, wherein said step of applying a gauge further comprises the step of inserting the body of the workpieces into a through hole formed adjacent to said pair of gauge portions.